The Boston Consulting Group



WetFeet Insider Guide

2005 Edition

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Insider Guide

The Boston Consulting Group

2005 Edition

WetFeet®

Helping you make smarter career decisions.

WetFeet, Inc.

The Folger Building
101 Howard Street
Suite 300
San Francisco, CA 94105

Phone: (415) 284-7900 or 1-800-926-4JOB
Fax: (415) 284-7910
Website: www.WetFeet.com

The Boston Consulting Group

ISBN: 1-58207-446-1

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The Boston Consulting Group at a Glance

Headquarters

Exchange Place, 31st Floor
Boston, MA 02109
Phone: 617-973-1200
Fax: 617-973-1339
www.bcg.com

Primary Competitors

Bain & Co., Booz Allen Hamilton, McKinsey & Co.

Key Differentiating Factors

- Heavier focus on strategy and operations projects (less on reengineering) than other firms
- Huge international presence (only about 30 percent of revenue is U.S.-based)
- One of the most prestigious consulting firms in the world

In the Recruiter's Words

"We are looking for candidates who are both analytically facile and possess strong interpersonal and leadership skills. We are looking for people who others will be motivated to follow."

"In all our new hires, we look for evidence of creativity, strong analytical and communication skills, and a fondness for problem solving. Candidates should also communicate their desire to make an impact on our clients' businesses."

In the Interview

"In the interview, I spent about 40 percent on case questions, 40 percent on my resume, and 20 percent on asking questions about the firm," says one insider. BCG case questions tend to be based on real business issues that the firm's

consultants have tackled in the past—not on brainteasers. "I interviewed at Bain and BCG," one recent associate hire says. "At BCG, the case was a challenging exercise and my interviewers worked through it with me. It was not adversarial at all. With Bain, it felt more like a test."

What Insiders Say

"We have a very open atmosphere—titles don't matter here. You can go into the office of a senior partner or someone a week out of school, and have the same conversations."

"BCG people aren't just using the firm as a stepping-stone to their next career goal. They want to be here."

"The folks that do well here are people who are innately curious, don't like the cop-out solution, and have intellectual horsepower and social grace. They're socially adept."

"We are in a growth phase. We are hiring more associates. We're looking to become a bigger firm."

"There's a real emphasis on helping people get exposure and a diversity of experiences here. BCG tries to give people the flexibility to find something they're interested in."

"First and foremost, the people make this a great place to work. They have great integrity and are of the highest caliber intellectually and in many other ways. The work is also engaging. We have a lot of positive impact on companies."

The Career Ladder

- Undergraduates enter as associates.
- MBAs, lawyers, and PhDs enter as consultants.
- Candidates with Masters' degrees in unrelated fields start as associates or consultants, depending on the relevance of the degree to business leadership, work experience, and honors that they have received.
- Industry hires with 4 or more years of experience are usually required to start as consultants. Candidates with less experience may start as associates, depending on the depth of their previous roles and educational background.

Revenue

2003 revenue: $1.12 billion

1-year growth rate: 9.8 percent

Source: Hoover's.

Personnel Highlights

Consulting professionals worldwide, 2003: 2,600+

Estimated number of hires, 2004–05, United States and Canada

Undergrads: 70–80

MBAs and other advanced degrees: 200–300

MBA summer consultants: 75–125

Undergrad summer associates: 15–25

Estimated Compensation, 2003–04, United States and Canada

Undergrads: $54,000, plus $5,000 signing bonus

MBAs: $100,000, plus $20,000 signing bonus

MBA summer consultants: $1,900/week, plus $6,000 upfront payment

Undergrad summer associates: $800/week plus $1,000 upfront payment

Source: WetFeet research. Note: BCG does not release compensation figures; these are based on WetFeet estimates.

The Firm

- Overview
- Competitive Strategy
- Industry Position
- A Quick History Lesson
- Organization of the Firm
- Recent Client List
- Typical Studies
- What's Hot

Overview

With offices in places like Helsinki, Sao Paulo, and Warsaw, and about 70 percent of total revenue (which were $1.12 billion in 2003) coming from overseas, The Boston Consulting Group defies its provincial name. The firm is comfortably settled within the top tier of management consulting firms, and its widely recognized strategy work and international status make it competitive with the likes of McKinsey, Booz Allen, and Bain. With little more than 2,600 consultants (compared to more than 8,000 for McKinsey) and a reputation for generating innovative ideas, BCG manages to stand out despite its relatively small size. BCG differentiates itself from the competition with its autonomous but supportive atmosphere, its creative approach to problem solving, and a heavy focus on strategy and operations work.

Founded in 1963, BCG came to prominence in the 1970s when it began challenging industry giant McKinsey at its own game. Aiming straight at CEO-level strategy work, it grabbed clients, headlines, and top MBA talent, demonstrating that McKinsey was not the be-all and end-all of consulting. From the outset, BCG studiously avoided being just another firm, putting in the hard work it takes to be an innovative industry leader. It developed a number of analytical tools that quickly wrote the firm into the management consulting canon, including time-based competition, disease management, the experience curve, and of course the ubiquitous "cash cows, dogs, stars, question marks" two-by-two matrix.

Insiders say creativity and new ideas are highly valued. "We make real, fundamental change—we push our clients very hard sometimes to find the right solution," says one insider. "We approach problems in a very difficult, structured, and

logical way—a way that might not be easiest to implement, or the most politically acceptable."

The technology and e-commerce explosion of the last decade was a great boon for the consulting industry and BCG was no exception. But BCG wasn't spared the effects of the downturn that followed. Global revenue fell in 2001, and the voluntary attrition rate slowed. Similar to other firms, layoffs followed. BCG cut consulting and support staff by 12 percent in North and South America in the first quarter of 2002.

But now business is surging again, driven by rebounding financial services and industrial goods markets. BCG insiders say they are working on a range of projects, picking up new clients and serving companies they've already helped. The firm is eager to build long-term relationships. "There's a lot of repeat business, follow-up work," says an insider, adding, "There's more work than we have staff to put on projects. The prospect is that we will be very busy in upcoming months and years. Our hiring directives have gotten much higher over the past 6 months."

In an annual poll of consulting professionals conducted by *Consulting Magazine* in 2003, BCG ranked number five on the list of the best firms to work for, falling one spot from the previous year. But falling from first to five doesn't necessarily mean much—these types of shifts are not unusual on "best of" surveys. Some BCG critics have complained about the high-pressure environment, but that's part of the management consulting culture. "It's an intense job," says one insider.

Still, BCG has a reputation for being a great place to work largely because of its egalitarian and humane work environment. One insider who went part-time to be able to devote more time to family praised the firm's flexibility: "Maintaining a good work/life balance can be hard, but I've done it. Part-time is only tough

on the client service end. We do great work for clients, and there's always the urge to do more."

In the 2004 edition of *Fortune*'s annual poll of business school students, BCG ranks fifth among consulting firms that future MBAs would like to work for after graduation. With so much going for it as a career option, BCG is a tough place to get hired at both the associate and consultant levels. But insiders say it's worth the effort. "BCG is considered a desirable place to work," says one insider. "It's hard to get a job here so expectations can be high. But working here has more than met my expectations—it's been a phenomenal experience."

The Bottom Line

BCG may be one of the smaller strategy firms but it casts a long shadow. Clearly among the consulting elite, BCG measures itself against McKinsey and Bain. A number of other top management consulting firms measure themselves against BCG. Although the work itself is pure consulting, the preferred flavor at BCG is strategy and cutting-edge analysis. As at many top consulting firms, the congenial environment and prestige don't come cheap—the people at BCG work extremely hard to earn their salaries.

Competition for the available spots each year is always intense. One insider involved in recruiting confirmed that the firm hires about one in 200 applicants for associate positions. More of these candidates are applying through the outstanding careers section on the company's website. "Our number of applications has not changed a lot over the past 5 years," says the insider. "We're getting more applications through our online portal."

Competitive Strategy

Since its inception, BCG has focused on strategy projects rather than implementation work. "We're not a firm you'd hire to implement an already existing strategy; we don't take on implementation work that we didn't come up with," says one insider. Indeed, BCG insiders stress that clients come to it for creative approaches to tough problems.

Through good and bad markets, BCG hasn't much altered the way it differentiates itself in the consulting marketplace over the years. "The way we're differentiating ourselves is not all that different than what we've done in the past," reports one insider. "We're not an off-the-shelf solution type of place. There isn't much pandering to the client and telling them what they want to hear. It's not always easy, but we tell them what we really think. Ultimately, that's what keeps us in business."

BCG is known for its academic approach to business and its use of conceptual frameworks based on macroeconomic trends. Two of the latest BCG-originated concepts are "deconstruction of the value chain" and "asset productivity." In a nutshell, the two concepts refer to the increasing tendency of corporations to outsource production and their consequent need to extract more value from core assets—although one BCG insider warns that deconstruction is, in fact, a bit of a vague catchall term that could be applied to any number of strategic applications. (For more information, refer to the "What's Hot" section.) BCG people also describe the firm's growing network of relationship-based client interaction. Like all top-tier consulting firms, BCG strives to secure repeat business by making its client relationships as collaborative as possible. "We call it 'going north with clients,'" says one insider. "We're striving to do more than

just one project with companies. Clients don't just want you to hand them a strategy in a binder and then leave. They want to build a relationship with you." Another insider thinks that BCG "works with clients more effectively than some of our competition."

Despite the widely reported slump in big technology initiatives, technology projects still make up a significant portion of BCG's cases. Unlike giants such as Accenture and Capgemini, BCG doesn't actually write the code and do hands-on technology implementations. One insider says, "They're more likely to tell you to buy the technology, because they're after the implementation business. At BCG, you'd get a more objective opinion, because we stop short of programming code." Instead, BCG places the technology investment decision into a strategic framework, helping the client determine whether such an investment would add sufficient value.

Besides IT, insiders mention these areas as core to BCG: distributive strategy, market-entry strategy, technological licensing strategy, change management, and pricing. Internal projects, called Tier One projects, also demand the time of some BCG consultants. These projects may not generate direct revenue, but the results of interesting projects are often widely reported in the press, enhancing the firm's reputation. "We will always do those types of projects. They help keep us smart and on the cutting edge," says one insider. The general consensus among insiders is that business has picked up and that BCG is well positioned for future growth. "In the past, we have had a tendency to capture market share during downturns," notes one insider.

Industry Position

BCG's ability to attract high-profile strategy and operations projects has helped the firm to maintain a position of influence that's disproportionately larger than its physical presence.

According to *Consultants News*' 2004 ranking of the "50 Largest Management Consulting Firms in the World," BCG came in at number 22. Of course, most of the largest firms on the list do more large-scale technology implementations than strategy. The table on the next page shows where BCG ranks in terms of revenue against the top-ten firms and its main competitors.

Where MBAs Want to Work, 2004

The ranking below is from *Fortune*'s 2004 survey of MBAs, who ranked the companies where they would most like to work. BCG fell from number three to number 13. McKinsey, which ranked number one in 2003, retained the top spot.

Consulting Firms that Ranked in the Top 50

Rank	Firm
1	McKinsey & Co.
4	IBM
7	Bain & Co.
10	Booz Allen Hamilton
11	Deloitte
13	Boston Consulting Group
27	Accenture

Source: Based on a study by Universum, published in *Fortune*. Ann Harrington, *Fortune*, 4/19/2004.

Top 10 Management Consulting Firms & BCG's Main Competitors

Rank	Firm
1	IBM
2	Accenture
3	Deloitte
4	Capgemini
5	CSC
6	BearingPoint
7	Hewlett-Packard
8	McKinsey & Co.
9	Mercer
10	SAP
11	T-Systems
12	Booz Allen Hamilton
18	EDS (excluding A.T. Kearney)
21	Towers Perrin
22	Boston Consulting Group
25	Bain & Company
26	A.T. Kearney

Source: Excerpted and reprinted with permission of *Consultants News* June 2004; *Consultants News*/Kennedy Information, Peterborough, NH 03458 USA; phone: 800-531-0007; www.ConsultingCentral.com.

A Quick History Lesson

In the early 1960s, the consulting profession was a roll-up-your-sleeves-and-fix-the-problems-on-the-line type of industry. Even giants like McKinsey and Booz Allen focused primarily on providing clients with operations advice. And then there was Bruce Henderson. A former Arthur D. Little consultant, Henderson looked at the world of business from a new, treetop perspective. In 1963, he formed a firm under the wings of a Boston-area bank, giving birth to a new generation of consulting firms. Although Henderson and the bank soon parted ways, his firm, The Boston Consulting Group, carried on.

BCG came to prominence in the 1970s when it began to nip at the heels of the older, bigger firms, scoop some of their clients for top-shelf strategy work, and make its mark on the intellectual frontier of consulting. One of BCG's early and lasting innovations was its focus on high-level strategy projects. BCG was among the first to build its business primarily on strategic work and to work closely with the CEO. Its smaller size and its academic approach to business issues offered a fresh alternative to the more established management consulting firms. The firm also established a reputation for its business analysis and commentary. One of Henderson's early marketing efforts was a series of monographs, called *Perspectives*, on topics of general interest to business leaders. BCG continues to publish and distribute them to clients.

The 1990s were a period of growth for BCG and the consulting industry in general. But BCG opted not to grow as aggressively as some competitors. Indeed, its smaller size has always been one of its differentiators. Historically, it has also been known for its creativity, ability to customize services for clients,

and objective analysis. Although it has worked increasingly on helping companies implement plans in recent years, its sweet spot remains developing strategy.

In keeping with the firm's international flavor—only about 630 of its 2,600 consultants are based in the United States—BCG elected its first European employee as president and chief executive in April 2003. A German, Hans-Paul Bürkner took over from outgoing president Carl Stern in December 2003. Mr. Bürkner was named *Consulting Magazine*'s consultant of the year in 2003.

Organization of the Firm

View from the Top

BCG still runs itself as a private firm, although it does have a CEO. As a private company, it doesn't have to report its earnings to the public, reveal who's in charge, or share much information about its internal management structure—and for the most part it doesn't. Its business is organized into several, sometimes overlapping, practice areas, each of which addresses a key management issue or industry. New consultants are not required to join a particular practice area. On the contrary, they're encouraged to be generalists—experimenting with different industries, projects, and clients and working in more than one practice area. This fluidity has proved very attractive to many applicants. One insider says, "I wanted a generalist firm, and BCG gave that to me. Coming from a banking background, I've been able to work in retail, e-commerce, and health care."

Another also ticked off a list of all the industries he's worked in: building materials, mining, health care, high tech, e-commerce, and utilities. Underlying the practice areas is an internal network of "knowledge areas," which actively collects data on business trends and obstacles.

BCG's practice areas comprise industry groups and functional groups.

Industry Groups

- Consumer
- Energy and utilities
- Financial services
- Health care
- Industrial goods
- Retail
- Technology and communications
- Travel and tourism

Functional Groups

- Branding
- Corporate development
- Deconstruction
- Diversity
- Globalization
- Information technology
- Operations
- Organization
- Pricing
- Strategy

View from the Middle

Beyond practice and knowledge areas, BCG organizes its business around regional offices. Consulting teams are usually staffed with people from the office that sold the project, but it's not uncommon for associates and consultants to work on projects managed by other offices. An online staffing system gives consultants visibility into projects being staffed locally as well as outside their office.

Offices function relatively independently. Appointed by the CEO, one office administrator (OA), usually one of the most senior partners, manages each office. Insiders tell us that the culture of each office typically reflects the personality and management style of the OA. At some point during the recruiting process, you'll be asked where you'd like to work, and it will help you out if you can tell your recruiter why you'd like to work in a particular location. Talking to people in a specific office is the best way to find out which location is right for you. One recent business school graduate and current BCG consultant found that talking to classmates who had been associates at BCG helped him decide which BCG office was likely the best fit for him.

View from the Bottom

A BCG project team is usually made up of three to six members from different levels within the firm. Depending on the project type and the client, there may be a number of small teams working independently and simultaneously on different aspects of a large study. "Each team finds its own style," says an insider. "On any team the characters of the individual members are important. Four different cases will mean four totally different sets of interactions," reports another.

Work is typically broken into modules, which are completed by individual team members or small groups. Projects normally last 3 to 6 months, but clients often request follow-up work at the conclusion of a project. One consultant described the typical 3-month breakdown like this: The first month you spend considering the appropriate strategy for the business, the second you concentrate on economics (asking questions like, "Is this a good market for this company?"), and the third month you focus on implementation.

BCG consultants used to work on the two-case model—that is, working on two projects at a time—but the one-case model is now more prevalent. "From the client's perspective, the one-case model works better, but from the consultant's perspective, it's not as good." With the one-case model, your job satisfaction depends to a large degree on whether you have a compelling case. After reciting all the cases he had worked on, one enthusiastic insider said, "I've had great luck with cases—mine have all been interesting."

Recent Client List

Consulting firms are notoriously tight-lipped about the names of their clients. You've heard the refrain, "Sure, I could tell you . . . but then I'd have to kill you." But by doing a little detective work, we've uncovered the following BCG client names.

Aetna Life & Casualty
All India Management Association
Wyeth
AMR (American Airlines)
Avery Dennison Corporation
Bazar de l'Hotel de Ville
Canadian Government
EC PHARE
Ford Motor Company
Harvard School of Public Health
IBM
Initiative for a Competitive Inner City
Japan Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association
Keebler (a part of Kellogg's)
Pfizer
Russian Ministry of Fuel and Energy
The Dallas Foundation
Orbitz
U.S. Agency for International Development
Whirlpool

Typical Studies

Following are several examples of BCG projects. BCG's traditional forte has been its strategic work and industry and company studies. But the firm also tackles implementation projects, especially those related to postmerger integration—the period after companies have merged. Notably, however, BCG's postmerger projects generally have a strong strategic component.

Survey of the Open Source Software Community

A survey of "hacker" ("hacker" meaning an OSS programmer involved in the OSS community, not people who bust into computer systems) culture published in 2002 explores the human factors that have contributed to the success of open source software. The study's two authors, a consultant and a senior manager at BCG, surveyed 526 OSS developers for insights into why they contribute to the OSS community, their professional backgrounds, and the average time they spend on shared programming projects.

Though hackers have made significant contributions to the marketplace such as the Linux operating system, the study notes that the open source model offers the business world potentially more valuable contributions in the form of insights into motivation and creativity. The survey shows that intellectual enjoyment fuels the creativity of hacker culture and posits that companies that are able to foster a similar level of employee motivation will enjoy a distinct competitive advantage.

Massachusetts Biotechnology Study

Published in December 2002, this report speculates on the future of the Massachusetts biotechnology industry. According to the study, Massachusetts risks falling behind in the biotech job and investment hunt unless policymakers take steps to foster a favorable business climate for the industry. The study was completed in conjunction with the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council. Investment tax credits, closer collaboration between public and private researchers, and encouraging state investment funds to invest in the life-science industry are among the study's recommendations.

Mobile Commerce Industry Study

This report observes that while the promise of mobile commerce remains largely unfulfilled, great potential remains. It notes similarities between the current state of mobile technology and that of the Internet 5 years ago and asserts a similar explosion in use could be imminent. The report advises that new initiatives must capitalize on the unique capabilities of mobile applications to serve the consumer. Critical steps must be taken to build a mass market. The user experience must be well managed. The customer experience should be linked to specific locations. And, of course, sustainable business and revenue models must be created.

Pharmaceutical Company Manufacturing Strategy

A major pharmaceutical firm engaged BCG to help it develop a drug manufacturing strategy. BCG considered the optimum shape of the manufacturing network and came up with recommendations on how the firm could best approach manufacturing, including how much of it to outsource and how much to do in-house.

Retail Time-to-Market Strategy

BCG worked with a large retailer to speed the time to market of its products. The BCG team explored ways to improve the retailer's supply chain by interviewing key people within the client's operation, its many suppliers, and, of course, plenty of number crunching and analysis.

Consumer Electronics Company Product Strategy

BCG worked with a company that had invested a lot of money in a consumer electronics technology that was selling poorly. The company wanted to know whether it could use this technology in other ways. An insider describes what happened after BCG studied the situation: "We said no—there were simply no good applications to justify keeping the technology. We recommended selling it. And the client just didn't want to hear that."

What's Hot

Drop the "E" and Keep the Technology

The meteoric rise and fall of so many dot coms has markedly changed perceptions about e-commerce and called Internet strategies into question. And you won't find a lot of BCG projects involving Internet startups these days. However, Internet-related consulting is not dead by any stretch. Established companies continue to look for ways to use the Internet to maximize efficiency and profits. Areas such as digital asset management and customer relationship management are gaining prominence. "No one calls it e-commerce any more," says one insider. "The trend is to look more broadly at how digital technology is impacting various industries. There is still plenty of work around how new technology is enabling Web-based cost savings and process organization."

Back to Basics

Clients are looking hard at the value consultants provide. They are asking themselves questions about the value different firms bring. It forces BCG (and other firms) to justify itself and what it offers by way of client value. One insider said, "Clients expect more. They're looking to optimize the money they are spending on consultants." With an uncertain economy to contend with, tried-and-true business concepts are experiencing something of a vogue. Brand building, new product development, and pricing are all bringing clients in the door at BCG. Clients are looking for value and for ways to improve the bottom line without undertaking potentially risky ventures. "We are seeing quite a bit of work around pricing," another insider notes. "Using the right kind of theories

to do pricing can help clients grow their top-line without any contribution to their cost base."

Deconstruction of the Value Chain

You've heard about vertical integration—corporations internally managing the entire production process, from conception and manufacturing of products through sales, marketing, and distribution (think IBM, up until 1993)—but have you heard of deconstruction of the value chain? With forces such as globalization and the Internet encouraging consumers to shop around, corporations are feeling competitive pressures to outsource larger chunks of their production process and focus on one functional niche. But where does it make the most sense to specialize? What supplier relationships should the corporation pursue? Where are the opportunities to build businesses between, among, or for related companies and partners using the Internet? That's where BCG comes in, helping its clients to recast their competitive strategies and develop action plans to streamline operations accordingly.

Always Thinking

BCG is a place that encourages and nurtures intellectual growth. As such it has formed what might be described as an in-house think tank to help formulate innovative strategic approaches and to keep the firm looking that much further ahead. Directed by Senior Vice President Bolko von Oetinger in Munich, the Strategy Institute's mission is to seek out insights from areas such as the natural sciences, the humanities, the social sciences, and culture and apply them strategically to BCG's work with clients. For example, the Strategy Institute is responsible for the publication of *Clausewitz on Strategy*, in which the insights and strategies of 19th-century Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz are offered as guides to 21st-century captains of industry. The Institute is also working with a

microbiologist to apply an algorithm he developed from evolutionary biology to make predictions concerning the growth of networks—pretty heady stuff. Dealing in more concrete issues is the Strategy Practice Initiative, which attempts to ferret out technologies that will become commercially viable in the next 5 years and anticipate the potential impact of these on clients' businesses.

On the Job

- Associates
- Consultants

Associates

Associates at BCG are new BAs and BSs and undergraduates with relevant work experience or additional education. MBA insiders speak very highly of the undergraduate pool. "The raw talent is amazing," says one. Associates are thrown immediately onto project teams, and their responsibilities grow with their capabilities. "I've been doing second-year consultant–grade work as a second-year associate," says an insider. They can expect guidance from the project leader during the first case, but associates soon begin assuming many of the roles of consultants. Another associate says, "When you first start out, your experience is padded by management and peers who help ensure you are thinking about the project in the right way."

Unlike some firms, associates work directly for project leaders rather than for junior consultants. BCG also is unusual in the amount of contact its associates have with clients. One associate said he was meeting with the CFO of a client just a few months after joining BCG. On another occasion, not long after, he was making presentations to the CEO, president, and CFO of another company. "They'll take the time to prepare you, and they'll protect you while you're learning what to do," the associate says. "But they'll throw you into the deep end when they think you're ready."

Another insider says that associates have to be prepared to offer frank analysis, even when they're not sure that the client will like it. "It's a client service organization. You're not always telling the client what they want to hear," one insider explains.

BCG associates spend most of their time on the following activities:

- Analyzing research findings
- Developing conceptual frameworks to apply to a particular project
- Planning and conducting field research at client sites
- Collecting data and information from libraries and other sources
- Interviewing clients, customers, and competitors and working with clients in a team environment
- Working on "investment projects" (research and analysis that BCG takes on to develop new capabilities or clients)
- Communicating team findings and ideas to the client
- The oft-dreaded, but compulsory, spreadsheet-crunching and heavy data analysis

" "

They'll take the time to prepare you, and they'll protect you while you're learning what to do. But they'll throw you into the deep end when they think you're ready.

On the Job

Sample Projects

A client in the consumer products industry wants to find a new way to segment customers. The associate's challenge is to figure out effective ways to identify the highest value customers without having tons of data about them and then to advise the client on how it can use its promotion dollars more efficiently to reach those customers. "We used existing data to find a unique segment of high-value customers the client might otherwise have missed," says an insider.

We also heard about a third-year associate who led an implementation project, serving as the one full-time resource working with 20 to 30 people at the client site, without day-to-day supervision. "To be 25 or 26 and given that kind of responsibility is pretty neat," says an insider. "You won't do it overnight, but it will happen."

Another associate worked on a project for a major food and beverage company that wanted to grow its business. BCG was brought in to evaluate a number of different avenues such as products targeted at empty nesters, women, or children. The associate we spoke to looked specifically at how the company could take its portfolio of products and target kids, but not, the associate was quick to point out, "with the usual junk."

A Day in the Life of an Associate (Undergraduate)

7:00	Get up and head out the door, usually without eating breakfast.
7:45	Meet teammates downstairs at our hotel in Denver before heading over to our client.
8:15	Arrive at the client's office, and rush to prepare my slides and last-minute analysis.
9:30	Meet with the client and go over what we've found so far.
11:00	Gather more data for the client in answer to some questions. Take a few more moments to catch my breath . . . and catch up with e-mails.
11:30	Grab some Japanese food for lunch. Sometimes one or two people will pick-up a take-out order and we'll eat at the office. On other occasions we go out as a team, which I really like when we have the time.
12:30	Run through some more analyses in preparation for a meeting with the project leader.
1:30	Meet with the project leader to review my findings.
2:30	Pop out a few more data requests from the client.
3:00	We have another meeting with a group of managers from the client. They want to check in and sniff around a bit to see if everything's moving forward. They seem satisfied and, more importantly, intrigued with our research.
4:30	Follow up on yet more requests for data.

5:00 Take some time to speak with outside vendors to gain a fuller perspective about the client. We like to get a lot of points of view about a client because most of the time, clients won't do that themselves. We like to know what they're doing well and what they're not doing as well.

6:00 Data-crunching time.

7:30 Done with the bulk of the day. I leave with the team and return to the hotel, where I use my downtime to lift some weights and run on the treadmill. I even find some time for a quick swim near the end.

9:00 Go out for dinner with some members of the team. Once a week everyone tries to go out together. On those occasions, I don't get a chance to work out. But everyone needs balance, right?

10:30 Return to my hotel room and crunch some more numbers and do some more analysis. It's a hotel room—what else am I gonna do?

12:00 Phew! Lights out.

Consultants

Each year BCG hires an elite band of consultants from top business schools and, increasingly, law schools and university graduate school programs. When asked what his job involves, one consultant says, "It's a combination of brainstorming and evaluating issues with a team, doing hard-core analysis, both qualitative and number-crunching, and spending a good amount of time with the client, trying to see things from their perspective. But when it comes down to it, my job is about creating presentations. The client's buying our insight, sure, but packaging that insight takes time. I'd say about 10 percent of my time is spent making slides and editing and all that." Says another insider, "You can't get around the grunt work, although it's only a small part of the job. Your professional output is the written word. I've been up at 2:00 in the morning making sure the words are spelled correctly." According to another insider, "Finding the answer is important. Finding a way to present that is even more important. If something isn't well-received or is hard to understand, then you've lost all that work."

Insiders report that new hires typically undertake the following types of work:

- Developing financial models
- Participating in and leading brainstorming sessions
- Conducting interviews with clients, competitors, and external information sources
- Performing market analyses
- Conducting online or library research
- Developing and testing hypotheses about client issues
- Meeting with team members to develop work plans and lay out project strategy

Sample Projects

A record company engaged BCG to look at how the company could integrate digital asset management across all regions and business units. “I spent a year working with the company,” says one insider. “My team explored what savings they could expect and how the processes would work.”

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Another common type of project helps clients assess the costs and benefits of continuing a particular line of business or product line. One insider describes a project for a paper company that had been sustaining heavy losses in a particular line of business: “Our team had to decide what to do with that line of business—keep it and make it better or sell it to an acquiring company. We developed a certain hypothesis and then tested it out by talking to the client’s customers, looking at financial and operational data, and reading press releases and other industry-related information on the Internet.”

Not all projects involve mega-corporations. One insider described a case he had worked on for a relatively small company. The case involved developing process improvements for the company’s warehouse and distribution systems, but he found it particularly satisfying to work with a smaller client: “We were able to have a huge positive impact on the client’s operations.”

A Day in the Life of a Consultant (MBA)

8:30 Arrive at work and spend the first half-hour responding to voice mails and e-mails.

9:00 Prepare for a meeting with my teammates. We review our work every week and evaluate how a project is going.

10:00 We have a case meeting and review each of the modules. We all chime in and give feedback. There's typically a lot of give-and-take.

12:00 Mmm . . . spicy chicken sandwich for lunch. I like to sit outside and eat when I can. It's always refreshing to get away from the fluorescent lights and computers for a while.

1:00 Do analysis of a case and hunt for information from a database.

4:00 Speak with a client to go over some findings. What's stimulating to me is taking data and running with it, showing the client how the information is useful. I finish up some analysis that I started that afternoon.

6:00 I hit the gym for a spinning class. We're busy and work long hours, but there's also time to have a life.

7:00 I go home via the underground.

7:30 Thai food for dinner. There's time to have a life, but not necessarily to cook dinner.

8:00 Finish some analysis to present the next day to the project leader. I hang out with my roommate and finish the evening by reading some of the book I've been working on. In all, it's been a reasonable day. The level of intensity for a consultant waxes and wanes. There are times you might have to rearrange your schedule and stay late at the office. But there's a fair amount of flexibility. You can work from home. There's not a lot of emphasis on face time. I can't even remember what the official office hours are.

The Workplace

- Lifestyle
- Culture
- Workplace Diversity
- Compensation
- Vacation and Perks
- Civic Involvement
- Travel
- Training
- Career Path
- Insider Scoop

Lifestyle

The consulting lifestyle is difficult and fast-paced, and BCG is no exception. "I talk to my friends in marketing and PR who are complaining about their hours, and I always say, 'You have no idea,'" says one insider. "I'm not going to lie to you—most people here usually work 60 hours a week. People keep saying it's really nothing, but it is." Even so, there is a sense among BCG employees that the firm sincerely respects each person's private life. "If you have a kid, and you really need to get home, people really try to accommodate that," says an insider. Another says, "There's no question about it, the hours are substantial. Typically, I'm in at 8 a.m. and out at 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday." But he was quick to note that he does leave quite a bit earlier on Fridays.

BCG insiders tell us that the firm has been careful not to let employees get too carried away with work. "There are systems in place that make sure you don't work too much," says one insider. (Of course, the consulting standard for "too much" work is often pretty skewed.) "If someone bills 70 hours a week, 3 weeks in a row, a partner will make a call to the client and ask what's going on." Also, since BCG matches clients and regional offices based on geographic proximity and doesn't believe that staff must sleep at the client site, consultants' travel schedules are generally less hectic than at other firms. One insider from the Atlanta office notes that most of the clients served out of that office are in town or an hour or two away by plane.

Hours can vary dramatically according to location and the type and stage of the project you're working on. "In the middle of a case, you might only work 40 hours a week, while at the beginning or the end you're putting in 70," says one insider. "Strategy, on average, is also more time-demanding than implementation,

since there's a shorter time frame to work with," she asserts. "But there's a lot of flexibility. You can take work home with you, and if you're efficient, you don't need to be here." BCG insiders seem to think that their hours, overall, may be a little more reasonable than at other firms. "BCG doesn't put a premium on face time. People don't note when you come and go, and you're encouraged to go enjoy your life when you're between cases," reports another. Expect to work anywhere from 45 to 70 hours a week, with an average of 55 to 60. At any office, the number of hours will be higher if you've got a presentation coming up.

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BCG doesn't put a premium on face time. People don't note when you come and go, and you're encouraged to go enjoy your life when you're between cases.

Initially, the sour economic times led to a more relaxed pace, with unusually long waits between cases for many. But for the past year, it's been just like old times, with insiders reporting little downtime between cases. "I haven't been 'on the beach' between projects," says one insider. (See the "Consulting-Speak" section in the last chapter for a definition of on the beach.) "My projects have been almost overlapping. Our office has been so busy that we're bringing people from other offices to meet demand." Says another insider, "We have so much work and are trying to get through it all."

Culture

Despite a bumpy 2002, the number of consultants at BCG has grown from 1,940 worldwide to about 2,600 over the past 6 years. As one insider describes the impact, "I used to know everyone in the office, and now I see more and more people I'm not really sure I know." Still, growth and economic uncertainty do not seem to have eroded the culture or values of the company.

One aspect of the culture that clearly remains is its intellectualism. "The culture is very smart. There are lots of Rhodes scholars and people who finished first in everything they did," says an insider. In other words, this is the kind of place that doesn't cut corners; it's East Coast establishment, although insiders indicate it's more laid-back than that label suggests. Starting about 3 years ago, all North American BCG offices implemented a business-casual dress code, 5 days a week. An insider in the New York office says, "Vice presidents here wear jeans." (Of course, she emphasizes, they're nice jeans, with loafers). "I think it's part of the whole creativity and equality element we've got going on." Although BCG's Ivy League reputation is still alive and well outside the firm, insiders insist that it's not something that really occurs to them day-to-day. "It just doesn't feel Ivy to me. It's more wild and crazy and international than you'd think in terms of what backgrounds people have. There's definitely a prestigious feeling here, but it's not necessarily Ivy League."

The intensity of consulting in general can easily fuel competitiveness. But according to one insider, "BCG tries very hard to make sure there is very limited competition among its consultants. The firm goes out of its way not to compare you to others."

BCG insiders repeatedly praise the intelligent, supportive, respectful, and congenial atmosphere of the firm, especially in comparison to some of its main competitors. One insider says she received offers from several top firms, two of which offered her considerably higher compensation than BCG. "The people—I would say that's why I'm here, without hesitation. I'm working on a PMI right now and my hours suck, but I'm having so much fun, I don't really care. The perspectives here are tremendously diverse, and everyone's really devoted and enthusiastic about something. And that 'something' usually varies a great deal." Another insider agrees, recalling her decision process: "It mainly came down to the people—they seemed happy at their jobs, even after I really probed them. I felt like people were more personable and open, especially compared to places like McKinsey."

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People appreciate creativity here. If you come up with something crazy or off-the-wall in a meeting, people aren't immediately going to shoot it down.

Insiders also say they appreciate the nonhierarchical environment and think their creativity is valued. "People appreciate creativity here. If you come up with something crazy or off-the-wall in a meeting, people aren't immediately going to shoot it down." A former summer intern recalls, "As a summer associate, I wasn't treated as someone on the side. With clients, I was introduced as a consultant, not as a summer hire. . . . And I felt like I was really adding value to the client site." Another consultant emphasizes the weight BCG places on respect in the workplace: "There's a lot of 360-degree feedback here—consultants get reviewed by the administration, and part of your review is spent on how you treat your assistants and the administration." Of course, respect doesn't just mean good manners. One insider notes that the genuine personal and professional respect she has for her co-workers is one of the things she likes best about working at BCG.

Of course, despite any company's best efforts, it is impossible to escape the realities of a workplace populated by highly driven individuals. Disagreements with managers do exist. One insider said that although managers are reviewed by subordinates, the anonymous nature of the review and the lag time from the time you issue a complaint to the time a manager hears the feedback can make problems difficult to redress. Politics can take their toll as well. A system is in place that allows consultants to opt for projects based on availability; similarly, managers can see who is free to staff their cases. Theoretically, this is supposed to protect against preferential treatment. "It probably works pretty fairly when things are really busy," an insider notes—but favorites are played when things slow down.

BCG keeps individual offices small and familial. Insiders say that officers stay active in the careers of other professional staff, as well as in the firm's marketing and recruiting efforts, and that they sincerely want consultants to advance. "They tell us this over and over, so I might be brainwashed," says an insider. "They're telling us that they would love every single one of us to make partner." Office doors are always open, and there is not a strong sense of hierarchy or prestige associated with titles. One insider tells us that entrepreneurial efforts to improve quality of life within the office are encouraged, citing a colleague in her office who organized a yoga class.

Outside the office, some people get together, although BCG doesn't seem quite as social as some other firms, such as Mercer. "Not everyone here is a good friend of mine, but I definitely see people outside the office, especially during the week," says one insider. Another agrees, "Hanging out with people isn't obligatory, but it just sort of tends to happen." Insiders rave about the out-of-the-office activities organized by BCG's various social committees. "We play softball, go to outdoor concerts, take cooking classes together. Everybody's invited—from support staff to family and significant others," says an insider.

BCG also hosts an annual worldwide soccer tournament in Europe, pitting the best BCG office teams against one another. One insider complains that "it's a very married place"—but this may be a sign that BCG employees are somewhat more likely to have a life outside the office than contemporaries at other firms.

New hires train together as a class, and each class is allocated a budget for regular events, such as bowling, camping, hiking, sailing, and dinners. This promotes friendship and camaraderie among consultants of the same year. "Being in a class fosters a real sense of community," says one insider. "You become really close-knit, both socially and professionally." But at the macro level, insiders tell us that BCG lacks a unified corporate culture. (You won't be asked to memorize the corporate cheer upon your admission to the firm.) The attitude and atmosphere vary among the offices and are influenced (if not set) by the office administrator and size of the staff at each location.

Workplace Diversity

Business schools and consulting firms have struggled to become more diverse, but their efforts have not yielded impressive results. A recent study conducted by BCG found that only 7 percent of students in top business schools are black, Hispanic, or Native American, yet those groups make up 15 percent of the student population at top law and medical schools. "In terms of ethnicity, I think we could do a lot better," says an insider. "But a lot of firms fall short because it's difficult, expensive, and time-consuming to recruit different ethnicities than the B-schools provide." Another agrees: "I think we could be a lot more diverse in terms of the schools we recruit from, and in people's fields of study. We tend to recruit from the top ten schools, and that could really be expanded." Another insider elaborates on BCG's efforts to increase diversity: "There is great sensitivity to the lack of women and minorities in the business, and BCG makes a real effort to do more than make gestures. We reach out to them to make sure they see consulting as a viable career option." The firm's diversity efforts include identifying promising minority undergraduate candidates, holding special events at some schools to educate strong minority candidates about consulting and about BCG, attending the National Black and Hispanic MBA conferences, and recruiting at historically black colleges.

Diversity also depends greatly on office location; for example, a few New York insiders estimate that 30 to 40 percent of their staff is international. Insiders in other offices also speak of a strong international mix, but do not go so far as to call their office racially diverse. One does find much diversity of backgrounds, particularly in BCG offices outside the United States. For example, one insider comments, "In Europe, I worked with someone who had been a priest; in

Australia, I knew a consultant who'd been a professional musician." One vice president in an American office is a sculptor with a graduate degree in the arts.

Four diversity initiatives are in place at BCG: the Black Diversity Initiative, the Hispanic Diversity Initiative, the Gay and Lesbian initiative and another initiative for women, each of which focuses on recruiting, retaining, and meeting the needs of its respective group. In 1998, BCG appointed a director of diversity, a position whose purview covers both associate and consultant recruiting. In May 1999, BCG appointed its first African-American officer, and recruiters inform us that others have been appointed since then. In 2000, the company organized a diversity initiative with the objective of drawing more BCG employees into the recruiting and retention work. The firm says of itself, "We are committed to making BCG a company in which all individuals have an opportunity to flourish and succeed, regardless of their background, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation."

In 1997, BCG launched its Gay and Lesbian Network to address recruiting and retention goals among those communities. The GLN sponsors an annual, worldwide retreat, maintains a mentor network, hosts targeted recruiting dinners at key MBA schools, and maintains an intranet site. In November 2001, a Boston-based gay and lesbian networking organization recognized BCG for its "significant contribution to business, to the quality of work lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual (GLBT) people, and to the well-being of the New England GLBT community." Insiders report that several colleagues are out at work.

Opportunities for Women

BCG recruiters inform us that approximately 30 percent of their consultants, project leaders, and managers are women, and approximately 35 percent of the undergraduates the firm recruits are women. While these numbers don't seem to match insiders' perceptions—many report 50/50 gender ratios in their

entering classes—they're about average for the industry. A male insider says, "There are an awful lot of women—especially in the junior ranks, but not so much in the senior ranks." This pattern is shared by many consulting firms. According to insiders, the New York office is more than half female. "New York definitely has more women than the average," says one female insider. "A woman used to head up the New York office, and she recruited women heavily. Three women I know just made partner." The current head of the San Francisco office is a woman. Another female insider says, "I've never ever felt an issue of being female and not male. I have seen what one might term a 'female style' as equally successful both in BCG and with the client. . . . It's nice to have a lot of women in the firm if for no other reason than we learn from each other." "I definitely feel a sense of female community here," another says. "We have a number of women vice presidents, and there are informal mentorships." Recruiters report that a women's mentoring initiative, led by senior women BCG officials, was launched in early 2000. BCG allows a number of employees—both male and female—to work part-time. "There are plenty of women here who have had kids, stayed on, and made it work with their schedule. It's really great to see that," says an insider. In fact, several top male officers have switched to half time to spend more time with their kids.

Compensation

BCG is uniquely egalitarian when it comes to compensation. Everyone in a class begins with an identical salary, and salaries rise in lockstep as the class moves up the seniority ladder (of course, an individual's promotion can raise his or her compensation considerably). Once a year, a presentation is made to consultants delineating salaries at every level. Even the office head's take-home pay is disclosed. This transparency has the effect of eliminating petty salary jealousies, fears of gender bias, and so on. In addition to being fair, starting salaries have also held steady for the past couple of years. With no need to compete with Internet stock options and exuberance, the consulting industry as a whole hasn't had much pressure to boost offers. According to our estimates for 2003–04, MBAs in the United States will start with salaries of $100,000, and undergrads will start at $54,000.

The year-end bonus varies according to individual performance, and this is where the bulk of compensation differences are seen. One insider says this merit-based system means your year-end bonus may range from practically nothing to 40 percent of salary. Though the system at BCG is merit-based, the firm's revenue has a definite impact on bonuses. During recent off years, bonuses were lower than during boom times. But during years of exceptional company performance, BCG rewards staff by awarding an additional bonus. One insider says the compensation system is fair. "The process is pretty transparent," says the insider. "It's based on how you've performed, how you've been assessed over time."

In addition to salary, BCG gives its employees a great set of benefits, including generous health care and a profit-sharing retirement fund, which is 15 percent of the individual's total compensation—the higher the bonus, the higher the

profit sharing. Outside the United States, perks vary depending on the laws of the country, but you can expect something equitable. As a general rule, the firm pays for associates in good standing to go to business school. BCG also pays full moving costs for new hires.

Vacation and Perks

Both consultants and associates start with 3 weeks of vacation time, which is fairly standard in the consulting industry. After 2 years, vacation time increases to 4 weeks.

Insiders enjoy the BCG-sponsored activities outside the office, especially the social functions, sports teams, wellness days, and community service outings hosted by groups such as One Team, the New York office's social activity committee. "If you want to play sports, this is the place to be," laughs one insider. "We have teams for softball, soccer, rollerblading, volleyball. . . . People organize whitewater rafting, paintball, laser tag, rock climbing, tennis, jogging. . . . There just isn't time to do it all."

BCG also offers outstanding outplacement assistance for BCGers who decide to leave the firm. One associate we spoke to mentioned that partners had placed calls to personal friends at companies he was interested in exploring. "BCG gives an incredible amount of support when you are transitioning out of the firm," he says. "BCG, the partners, and alumni have been incredibly helpful in terms of leads. People who are being recruited by firms shouldn't be afraid to ask how helpful the firm is when it comes to sharing contacts."

Civic Involvement

On a pro bono basis, BCG has lent its consulting expertise to a number of nonprofit causes around the world. One of its recent projects tackled inner-city issues as part of the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, a Harvard Business School think tank led by Professor Michael Porter. The New York branch hosts a mentoring program for inner-city high school students, busing them to the office and helping them with homework, essays, and college applications. Twice a month, employees visit a women's shelter to play with the children living there. "One woman is always collecting clothes to take to shelters. If you want to organize a community service activity, you can do it." In October 2002, the entire Chicago BCG office spent a day building a playground for inner-city kids. One Chicago associate noted that, in addition to being very satisfying, it was a great team-building exercise.

Travel

Travel during projects varies greatly, depending on the type and stage of the project and the proximity of your office to major clients. BCG places a strong emphasis on regional travel and an economical use of face time on location. One insider worked on a case for 7 months and traveled only 2 days the entire time. Sound too good to be true? Well, yes—she worked some 80-hour weeks, after all—but minimal travel isn't as uncommon as you might think in places like the New York office, where much of the clientele is local. If you are hired in Boston or Washington, D.C., however, keep a bag packed. One insider says, "The firm wants us to do the work where it can best be done." If that means hanging out with the client, so be it. However, BCG consultants spend a good deal of time working in the home office and have the flexibility to telecommute if they wish. An insider says, "The travel is up and down. I'm not gone Monday through Thursday like some consultants, but I am gone 2 nights a week. It's not perfect, but I'm not sure anything is." On average, expect to be on the road 1 to 3 days a week.

Training

"Ninety percent of what people learn, they learn on their case assignments," points out one insider. Despite that, don't worry about being thrown in headfirst without getting a refresher on your PowerPoint and ISM modeling skills first. BCG trains all new hires through formal programs, on-the-job mentoring, and feedback from higher-level staff. All new associates and consultants participate in a local orientation, where they learn all about the workings of their office, meet key staff, and bond with their local peers. They all then have Entry-Level Skills Training (ELST) where they go through a case simulation and specific skills training to build their foundation for success with consulting and BCG, in particular. "For the first 4 months there was a lot of training," says one consultant. "You get to know the firm's culture and history, but it's not indoctrination. The training isn't riveting, but it's fine." A consultant in the Atlanta office says, "Our culture is very training focused. I have received more training since I came here than ever before in my professional life."

BCG staff also has an extensive e-learning system with instruction modules to prepare themselves for special issues they may face on a case, such as share valuation. Some of the modules are mandatory to do within their first 6 months, while others are optional. There are also skills workshops and ongoing training related to various practice areas, for which employees can sign up via e-mail. Non-MBA consultant hires take a business essentials course that provides them with the business background necessary to step into their jobs at BCG.

Beyond this formal training, you can expect to learn from the senior members of the BCG organization. Each class of hires has a dean, usually a project leader, who keeps tabs on how people in the class do on their cases.

Individually, all hires have an officer with whom they work to chart their careers. Insiders indicate that most of their learning comes from on-the-job experience and through interaction with others on their case team, as well as from senior-level members of the firm. BCG also has regular check-in meetings and forums, which vary by office. "We all have breakfast together every other Friday and learn about what everyone's working on," says one Boston insider.

Career Path

The consulting profession in general has a high turnover rate—many people decide they don't want to spend their lives living out of suitcases. Nevertheless, BCG has tried to create an environment in which people have the opportunity and the incentive to stay on for the long haul. "BCG hires people to keep people, not to have them go through an attrition process," says one insider. "They want you to succeed, not to work a couple years before they push you out." BCG seems to have a relatively good support structure for employees' personal and professional development. Each person has special relationships with four people: his or her office mate, the class dean (typically a manager or consultant who provides mentoring in regard to career issues, training, and working with other teams), an office sponsor (an informal buddy—no politics allowed), and a career development counselor who gathers feedback for semiannual performance reviews, aids career development, and communicates the employee's needs to the Career Development Committee.

The BCG food chain, in ascending order, goes from associate to consultant to project leader to manager and, ultimately, to vice president. In summer 2000, BCG made its promotion track more performance-based, rather than entirely tenure-centric, meaning everyone doesn't need to go through the 2-2-2-year process (consultant to project leader to . . .). However, insiders tell us that effects of the change have not been huge, and that it isn't entirely based on merit. One insider points out, "Going from consultant to partner in 8 years is very typical. . . . You could do it in 6, but that would be unusually fast." Another insider notes that the system is designed to "reward those at the margins who have shown exceptional ability or who have made a big difference."

Opportunities for Undergraduates

Undergraduates enter as associates, and they can get a promotion to consultant without going to B-school. BCG will frequently underwrite up to 2 years of graduate school plus an allowance for living expenses in the low five figures. The tuition and two-thirds of the living allowance are considered a loan that is forgiven if you return to BCG after graduation and stay on for at least 2 years. A large percentage of associates choose to go this route, and BCG encourages it with some offices offering GMAT prep courses and inviting recruiters from business schools to meet associates.

Although the bulk of BCG consultants sport an MBA, 2 years ago BCG formally ended the need for an advanced degree to move up to project leader. Because the change is so recent, it remains to be seen how many associates will actually skip the MBA hurdle and move up the BCG ladder without a business degree.

Opportunities for MBAs, JDs, and PhDs

MBAs, JDs, and PhDs are hired on as consultants, and those who enjoy the lifestyle and do well at the work can move up—based on performance—to project leader after about 2 years, to manager about 2 years after that, and finally, 2 to 4 years later, to vice president (partner). Although PhDs and JDs aren't as plentiful as MBAs, they are valued; one New York consultant estimates that 10 to 20 percent of his entering class has PhDs. With regard to promotions, insiders feel that the firm is particularly fair. Says one insider, "BCG is as close to a meritocracy as any company I've seen. I say exactly what I think here. There's no kissing up to people at all."

Opportunities for Midcareer Candidates

BCG does hire individuals with industry experience who have been out of college for 4 to 6 years. Industry experts make up only 5 percent of new recruits, but the firm is looking to increase that number. Industry experts usually join at the consultant level on a 3-year track to project leader status.

Midcareer hires are not expected to remain within their former specialty. Instead, they become generalists and move through the ranks like the more traditional college or B-school recruits. Once at the officer level, they may choose to return to their original industry specialization or move on to a new industry that they find more exciting. A few even continue as versatile generalists.

International Opportunities

BCG generates about 70 percent of its revenue from international business, and its network of international offices is expanding rapidly. It has long been one of the leading consulting firms in Japan, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, and during the '90s it expanded significantly in Asia, Central Europe, and Latin America. The firm's Ambassador Program allows both associates and consultants to spend time at a foreign office. Those interested can sign up to be transferred to a foreign office for a year or longer. Alternately, associates and consultants can get international experience by working on specific cases that require extensive field work abroad; they might be assigned to projects managed by a foreign office or transferred to a different regional office for anywhere from 6 to 18 months. Outside of this program, international opportunities tend to depend on BCG's casework and your performance locally, and you may have to struggle to get them. "It really depends on what's in the pipeline at the time. The timing has to work out right," says one insider. Another agrees, saying, "It's more typical that you'll travel internationally if the client you're working with has an internationally based office." There are opportunities, however, and one insider says the firm remains flexible in its international policies. "One woman I know decided to rent a flat in Paris, rather than flying back and forth every other week," she says. "The firm's paying for it."

Insider Scoop

What Employees Really Like

The Natives

"I realize this is a pretty generic answer, but the best thing really is the people," says one consultant. "There's a real openness here, from the administrative assistants to the head of the firm." Several BCG insiders we spoke with feel they have a lot in common intellectually with their colleagues, and that their brain-power and problem-solving capabilities are valued in the work environment. "BCG is filled with an interesting, diverse group of people who are passionate about what they do," says one. "It's a very supportive atmosphere," says another. "I've really enjoyed working with my class." "I just have this underlying feeling that all my colleagues are on the same wavelength as me," comments another. "We all think it's really exciting to figure out the truth . . . to figure out the right answer to a problem." Another says, "I think people here really care about each other. I had a potluck dinner the other night for people who weren't even on my project team."

Custom Made

Several insiders to whom we spoke had high regard for the BCG culture. Exactly what is it and how does it compare with the cultures of other firms? One insider explains: "You don't hear anything about the BCG way. There's less bonding around the BCG flag [than at some other firms]." In part, that may stem from the international flavor at BCG. The people we spoke to seem to genuinely value diversity and feel that other firms are a bit more conformist—more fraternity-like. "There's room for personalities not to get squashed here.

It's also very international, with a hodgepodge of backgrounds and personalities." One New York insider says, "You walk in and it's 40 percent international. The breadth of perspectives is really exciting, and it adds a lot to the culture and expertise of the firm." Employees also appreciate BCG's autonomous atmosphere. "I feel like I'm actively shaping my goals here and determining aspects of projects I'm working on," says one insider. Another agrees: "Because of the variety of work, you can build your own career here based on your interests and skills."

Get Out of the Box

On the work side, we heard several people talk about the intellectual and academic rigor of BCG projects. "BCG has a reputation for requiring the analysis to be rigorous. They're always looking for analysis that's really solid—even qualitative analysis and logic have to be tested over and over again. If you come up with something that's not very sound, people will definitely let you know." "There is no set BCG approach to any problem," another insider says, adding, "If you're the kind of person who needs a formula to fall back on, this is not the place for you." Insiders say that BCG is not a bookish place—that, on the contrary, its rigor comes from an insistence on developing original solutions to problems. As one consultant explains, "A lot of times, it will look as though the obvious answer is x, y, z. But we really push ourselves to go out of the box and look at it from new angles."

Never Stop Learning

Consulting attracts many people because of the constant intellectual challenge it provides, and BCG is certainly no exception. Insiders consistently mention the exciting mix of client work and the fast-paced academic environment. "The speed of learning is incredible. You spend 6 months on a particular project, and you learn so much about the industry. Then it changes to something completely

different. You accumulate such a cross-section of knowledge." Insiders say the work is very difficult, but exhilarating. "Work is just fun. I like all the change, all the different industries, the different companies—I never get bored. I'm always coming up against a problem that I'm afraid I just won't be able to figure out. That's where BCG is great." Says another, "People at BCG really like to kick back and think about the big-picture problems, think about hypotheses and how to test them."

Watch Out!

Always On the Go

The consulting lifestyle is not for the faint of heart or body. "It would be ideal if I could do the same work and not travel," says one consultant. Although BCG reportedly takes extra pains to see that its consultants don't have to work on a succession of field projects, most people can still expect, on average, to be traveling a couple of days a week. In addition to the rigors of travel, several insiders we spoke to complained of the unpredictable schedule that goes along with consulting. "It's hard to make plans, like dinner with friends, more than a few hours in advance," says one insider. "You do end up with free time, but it's unpredictable, and sometimes you have to cancel plans."

Truth in Numbers

That doesn't mean in the number of people who agree with you—that means you better like crunching numbers. Unless your inner-voice is a whiz with Excel, intuitive thinking won't get you very far at BCG. One insider puts it this way: "BCG is a 'prove it to me' culture. Show me the analysis, show me the survey results. The truth in the data will always win in the end, not necessarily the person who has the highest position in the firm."

Strategy-Heavy

BCG stresses that it helps clients implement its strategic recommendations, and we know from insiders that PMIs continue to come in the door. That said, BCG is not Computer Science Corporation: They are not going to implement any enterprise applications for clients. BCG consultants also spend more time focusing on strategic thinking than they do facilitating group sessions at a client site. "A lot of times, you get really passionate about an idea, you take it to the client, and then you say good luck—you basically walk away," says an insider. "Given what we charge, it's often not valuable for the client to use us to do the implementation." BCG's focus on brain-busting thinking may be a turnoff for some candidates. If you resented the pointy-headed A-plus students in your college Econ classes, BCG (and perhaps consulting in general) may not be for you.

Jump On In!

Consulting is a fast-paced business, and you'll be expected to become familiar with new industries and problems very quickly. "You're thrown into and expected to become conversant in new industries," says one consultant. "We charge a lot of money, and you need to add value quickly to the client. You need to have something valuable to say within a couple of days." The insider stresses that this adjustment can be difficult regardless of education level or background. "If you're young and right out of college, it can be hard reaching a comfort level where you know you're adding to the process. On the other hand, when you're 29 with an MBA, you think you know everything—you think you should be running the company. Adjusting can be difficult, and usually involves some bruised egos." Insiders also warn that your first case can often make or break your experience at BCG. Most top consulting firms will say that you are given a second chance if things don't work out on a particular case, but the reality is that an early failure is likely to hinder your career progression.

Getting Hired

- The Recruiting Process
- On-the-Record Recruiter Interview
- The Interviewer's Checklist
- Interviewing Tips
- Grilling Your Interviewer

The Recruiting Process

The competition for a position at BCG is stiffer than ever. Applications were up last year and so were hires. Hiring numbers at BCG for 2004 are up about 10 percent over last year. According to one BCG insider, "We're very busy, which means hiring targets are increasing. Revenues are improving; they are well ahead of where they were at this same time last year."

Although recruiting follows a centralized process, BCG offices hire separately to fill their own needs. Movement between offices is rare, so be sure to choose a place you can live with. BCG has an extensive on-campus recruiting program at top colleges, MBA programs, and some non-MBA graduate school programs. BCG hits most of the usual suspects in its recruiting efforts—Stanford, Harvard, Wharton, Kellogg, Chicago, the European Institute of Business Administration (INSEAD), Dartmouth, and MIT. If BCG recruits at your school, submit your resume through your campus career center. Don't despair if BCG doesn't recruit at your school or if you spent a few years making the world a better place. BCG still wants to hear from you; submit your resume online. A recruiter assured us that every application that comes through the website is read.

For most offices, BCG puts entry-level consultant candidates (MBAs, PhDs, and JDs) through two rounds of interviews and undergrad candidates through three. All interviews include case questions, so get ready to ace those suckers. (Check out WetFeet's *Ace Your Case* series for more practice case questions than you can shake a stick at.) The cases are usually drawn from a real case the interviewer has worked on. The first round of interviews may take place in a hotel off campus. During the final round, BCG will fly you to the regional office at which you want to work, but don't spend your bonus check yet. It's

not a guaranteed offer. You'll have two to four interviews during the half-day visit, and they'll be just as rigorous as those in the first round. During lunch you may meet some of the senior people in the office, as well as current consultants and associates.

For international offices, the approach may be slightly different. One European candidate reports, "The interviews were very conceptual. There was almost no quantitative content." On the other hand, we've heard of one case in which a candidate in Mexico was required to complete a preliminary math-skills exam before his first interview.

Typically, those who interview leave feeling that the process is well run, with ample opportunity to meet associates and consultants. "BCG was particularly good at following up to give feedback on interviews," says one interviewee. "They have a very informative postoffer process," says an MBA. Another insider says, "We generally get very high marks on communication from candidates." Those who aren't lucky enough to get very far in the process may feel differently. One unsuccessful candidate says, "I was extremely annoyed that BCG told us to be prepared for the second round the following week but made no mention of when we'd hear anything back. I waited as the second round passed by without a call, only to receive a regrets letter 2 weeks later."

Undergraduates

Gaining admission to the associate pool at BCG is notoriously difficult. BCG may have as many as 10,000 applicants for about 75 associate positions in North America. Most of the applicants have amazing backgrounds. You know the type: valedictorians, 1600s on the SATs, summa cum laudes, class presidents, sports stars. In 2004–05, BCG should hire 70 to 80 undergraduates in the United States. One factor to note: BCG likes to see clear evidence of

quantitative capability—course work such as economics or engineering, for example, or summer experience that involved working with numbers.

BCG has a summer associate program for undergraduates who have completed their junior year; we understand the firm plans to hire 15 to 25 for the program in 2005.

MBAs and Other Advanced-Degree Candidates

In the United States and Canada, BCG will probably hire between 200 and 300 entry-level consultants in 2004–05. The company says that in recent years, 15 to 20 percent of its new hires have come from PhD and JD programs. However, the firm doesn't follow rigid quotas. Although it actively recruits at the top ten or 11 business schools, graduates from other programs are encouraged to apply. An insider says that about a quarter of all interviewees make it to the second round and that about half of those get an offer.

Recruiters tell us that BCG has been among the more aggressive consulting firms in its efforts to hire non-MBA advanced-degree candidates. These applicants start at the same level as MBAs and receive additional business training within the company. Engineering degrees are common, economics degrees less so. If BCG does not recruit directly from your university or program, apply directly online on the careers pages of the website (www.bcg.com/careers/careers_splash.jsp).

Midcareer Candidates

Although it has no formal industry recruiting program, insiders say that BCG is looking to expand its ranks of people from the real world. Currently, about 5 percent of the consulting hires each year are from industry, but that number is growing. Although many industry hires do hold an MBA, it's not a requirement. For associate positions, BCG welcomes applications from those without an MBA who have 1 or 2 years of relevant work experience, such as investment banking, venture capital, or consumer goods, and/or additional education other than an MBA, JD, or PhD. To apply online, go to www.bcg.com/careers/apply/apply_online_splash.asp.

Summer Opportunities

BCG usually brings on a large crop of first-year MBAs as summer consultants; it will probably hire 75 to 125 for the summer of 2005. BCG also offers summer spots for about 20 exceptional undergraduates who have completed their junior year. Not only is this is a great way for an interested student to check out the firm (and vice versa), there is a tendency among consulting firms to choose applicants with previous consulting experience. If you are hired for the summer and you do well, you will almost certainly receive a full-time offer. Summer consultant insiders tell us that the firm goes out of its way to give the summer consultants challenging and interesting assignments.

On-the-Record Recruiter Interview

We designed the on-the-record recruiter interview to get you inside the recruiter's head and answer the questions you need answered to ace your interviews. The following is an interview with a BCG recruiting manager.

What do you look for in candidates' resumes?

Aside from providing evidence of the qualities we're looking for—including creativity, an aptitude for solving business problems, and strong written and oral communication skills—we ask recent graduates (undergraduate) to list their SAT scores, broken down by math and verbal. The cover letter is also a very important part of an application to BCG. Candidates who use one to strengthen and supplement the information on their resumes should find that it helps their applications considerably. It's also important to indicate your office location preference in the cover letter.

What are immediate turn-offs on a resume?

We're not looking for anything specific in terms of the formatting or the content of what people write. To us, what should be on the resume are the things the candidate believes are most important for us to know about him or her. Anything that misrepresents an experience or is otherwise untrue would be an immediate turn-off. Typos and resumes that are more than one page are also bad signs.

What interviewing methods does BCG use?

We use case interviews extensively in all rounds of the recruiting process. We don't do behavioral interviewing. Generally, the case interviews consist of

business problems our consultants have encountered during their tenure at BCG, so they're more likely to be real cases than brainteasers. We consider the case interviews to be conversational. We expect the candidate to engage with us as they work through the problem. There's no right or expected solution, but the interviewer will be looking for the thought process you employ and the communication skills you use to convey your answer. There's an interactive case on the website, which we recommend you use for practice.

How do you decide which candidates advance in the interviewing process?

It's not just interviews that decide whether a candidate will be asked back. The decision to advance to the next round is made by the recruiting director who considers the input of the interviewer or interviewers alongside the strengths of the original application that was submitted. In terms of how many people we decide to bring back, we don't aim for a certain percentage. If ten candidates are brought in and all ten are great, then we'll bring them all back. That means that if one pool is stronger than another, then we may bring back varying percentages from each pool.

What's the biggest mistake a candidate can make in an interview?

Not asking questions and being afraid of thinking out loud. When you think about it, the questions we ask aren't so difficult if someone just starts talking. A candidate should also be willing to be creative. Sometimes they're so nervous about saying the right thing that nothing comes out.

What's the best way to break into the interview cycle if you're not on campus?

By October, apply directly online on the Careers at BCG pages of the website (www.bcg.com/careers/careers_splash.jsp). Timing is critical—you don't want to miss the recruiting cycle. BCG welcomes and encourages applications from folks who are currently working. We consider them equally with on-campus

candidates. Also, there are many campuses where we don't actively recruit, because we don't have enough resources to do so. If we don't come directly to your campus, apply online, and we will figure out a way that works for both of us to bring you into the process. With our increased hiring targets for 2004–05 we are anxious to see candidates from all avenues. Our online application is an increasing source of talent.

What's the most effective way for a candidate to follow up after an interview?

A simple thank-you card to your interviewers is always appreciated. But in truth, nine times out of ten, we make a decision on a candidate the day the interview is done. Considering that, the thank-you card is a nice gesture but may not have real impact. In general, we will contact people by phone or e-mail as soon as a decision is made. If you haven't heard from us within a week of your interview, feel free to call us to inquire.

What are the qualities necessary for success in your firm?

There are lots of different types of people who are successful at BCG, so there is definitely no one magical formula. That said, creativity, strong analytical and communication skills, and a fondness for problem solving are some things that BCG consultants tend to have in common. BCG folks also share a desire to have an impact on the way our clients think about their businesses. If you are good at and derive pleasure from those things, you have a good chance of succeeding here.

The Interviewer's Checklist

BCG looks for the best and the brightest. Successful candidates come from diverse backgrounds, but most have completed quantitative course work along the way (economics and engineering count). "We're looking for a range of capabilities," says one insider. "Those capabilities extend along the problem-solving dimension, the communication dimension, and an attitude dimension." Here's a list of things the recruiter will be looking for:

- Academic ability (top grades a real plus; standardized test scores will be evaluated)
- Analytical skills (demonstration of quantitative course work and skills important)
- Integrity and ethics
- Interpersonal skills, ability to communicate and listen well
- Presentability and maturity (Can I put this person in front of a CEO?)
- Leadership
- Creativity
- Pleasant personality (Do I want to work with this person?)
- Enthusiasm, energy, and motivation
- Desire to make an impact on clients' businesses
- Empathy

Interviewing Tips

1. **If you've done hard-core intellectual work sometime in your past, mention it.** One good way to do this is to talk about a challenging academic problem you've faced. Try to present the example in a way that demonstrates your aptitude for consulting.

2. **BCG uses case interviews from the get-go, so be prepared.** Practice cases with your friends. "You're not born knowing the practice case—you work at them," says one insider. Remember, the key is not so much what you know, but how you think. Walk your interviewer through your analysis of the key issues rather than jumping right into "the answer." If two-by-two matrices come naturally, you're in good shape. In your answer, interviewers want you to show logic and structure, and then depth. "Just about everyone we bring in has an impressive background and good personal skills," notes a recruiting insider. "The case questions can be the differentiator." (See WetFeet's *Ace Your Case* series for in-depth discussion and practice of case interviews.)

3. **Be creative:** Almost every insider we spoke with emphasized that BCG is looking for people who tackle cases sans the standard solution formulas. "Don't always use the three Cs and four Ps," warns one insider. "That'll almost count against you. Don't get caught up in any regimented approach to doing cases—you need to incorporate the 'outside the box' BCG thinking style in your interview."

4. **Try to be conversational, rather than technical.** "In the interview, you really have to try to have an intellectual conversation about a business problem," says one insider. "Pretend you're talking about a case to a client

on an airplane—try being conversational. After all, one of the main things we're evaluating is your client presence."

5. **Be visual:** "It is a plus if you can draw something which illustrates your thinking," an insider says. Remember, an important part of your job will be conveying your thinking to the client as clearly as possible. In your interview you don't have the luxury of PowerPoint, so make a pencil and paper work for you.

6. **Be real:** "Focus on communicating your true personality in the interview, rather than guessing what the interviewer wants to hear," says one insider. Another agrees: "It's really obvious to the interviewer if you're just trying to kiss up to them."

7. **BCG believes in its differentiators and culture.** Therefore, you probably wouldn't impress your interviewer if you started talking about how all consulting firms are really the same.

8. **Demonstrate by your actions that you'd be a good person to work with** (in other words, work hard to keep your most irritating personal habits under control). One thing to keep in mind: BCGers don't go in for self-promotion or boasting.

9. **Showcase your leadership skills.** "We want people others will be motivated to follow," says one insider. "But we want leaders who are also fun to be around, not ones who just want subservience."

10. **Balance your professionalism with excitement.** "In the interview, it is okay to say something you've worked on was really 'cool' if you think it's really cool," says one recruiter. Show enthusiasm for learning and analysis, and be willing to challenge conventional wisdom. Remember, BCG prides itself on being able to create novel solutions.

11. **Make it clear that you can self-start** and maintain a high degree of self-motivation. Think of examples that demonstrate this quality. In particular, you may want to talk about situations in which you were able to function in unstructured environments.

12. **BCG attaches great value to a person's ethics and integrity.** Confess about the time you copied a buddy's paper, and you'll be shown the door.

13. **Ask questions:** Yes, we've already mentioned this but an insider tells us that it's so crucial, it bears repeating. "We say the biggest mistake (among applicants) is not asking questions," says the insider.

14. **Stay calm.** You have to stay calm in front of clients. "Too many candidates get nervous. What we care about is the steps in your logic," explains an insider. Be articulate and express your logic.

15. **Practice the case interview**, whether with friends or at career centers. You can read 20 cases but you're better practicing two. The practice of walking through a case is the best practice you can get.

Grilling Your Interviewer

This is your chance to turn the tables and find out what you personally want to know about BCG. We strongly encourage you to think up your own questions. In the meantime, however, the following samples should get you started. "Rare" questions are meant to be boring and innocuous. "Well Done" questions will help you put the fire to your interviewer's feet, but beware—they may also turn you to toast!

Rare

- What are the biggest areas of growth for BCG in the United States or internationally?
- What brings such a high percentage of your clients back to BCG again and again?
- How does BCG support the personal and professional growth of its employees?
- How different are the culture, atmosphere, and workload from office to office?
- Why would a client hire BCG rather than one of its competitors?
- How does BCG's international presence compare with its U.S. presence?
- How likely would it be for me to be staffed on an international project?
- How has the upturn in the economy affected BCG's business? Has there been an increase in projects, or has the firm been cautious about taking on new clients?

Medium

- What measures does BCG take to ensure that its strategic recommendations are implemented?
- What is BCG doing to increase office diversity and open up opportunities for women and minority candidates to reach the top ranks?
- How does BCG ensure new hires enjoy opportunities for advancement as the growth of the consulting industry slows?
- Why has BCG chosen not to go after reengineering work as aggressively as other firms have?
- Do BCG's leaders effectively communicate their view of the organization's goals and vision to BCGers at all levels?
- How would you change BCG or your work environment if you could?

Well Done

- I understand that BCG occasionally turns certain projects away. How does BCG determine what type of projects it will take on?
- Out-of-the-box thinking sounds good, but what does BCG do to make sure that it doesn't reinvent the wheel on each project?
- BCG has had a reputation for being academic. Do you find that to be true?
- What role do BCG's frameworks and concepts play in the real world?
- In what ways do you think BCG compares favorably to other leading firms like McKinsey and Booz Allen Hamilton?

For Your Reference

- Consulting-Speak
- Recommended Reading
- For Further Study
- Key People and Places

Consulting-Speak

To help prepare you for both your interviews and a possible career in the field, we've asked our insiders to give us the most up-to-date consulting jargon. Beware: Unauthorized use of these terms has been known to seriously offend every known species of consultant.

2x2. Pronounced "two by two," this is a favorite consulting tool used to analyze a number of items along two dimensions. It's basically a graph with X and Y axes that cross in the middle, creating four different sectors. Don't be surprised if you're asked to produce one of these during your interview.

Benchmark. Here's another standard-issue item from the consulting toolbox. Benchmarks are levels of performance or output against which you can evaluate the performance of something else. A benchmark study is an analysis of the performance of a number of companies along specified dimensions. For example, a software firm might hire a consulting firm to do a benchmark study on how much other firms are spending on customer service.

BHAG. Big Hairy Audacious Goal. This buzzword comes from the book *Built to Last* (see next entry).

Built to Last. A book written by James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, in which they destroy the myth that the core product is more important than the vision the company espouses. The term now enjoys widespread usage as describing a company with a strong culture based on a core ideology or identity. More loosely, it refers to those firms that want to be around for many decades or centuries, not just a few years.

Business design. Here's a consultant's definition: "For a company, it's not about growing your top line, it's about growing your bottom line." (The bottom line is profit. The top line is sales.) "Business design is about what you do, how you gear up the troops. It has everything to do with whom you hire and what they do. It's your channel, your product, how you execute your offering."

Case interview. In a case interview, your interviewer will give you a set of facts and ask you a question to analyze how you structure a problem, think it through, and ultimately come up with a solution. Case questions can be numerical, as in, "How many dimes are currently in circulation?," or business-related, as in, "Suppose a client asked you to figure out why his business is experiencing an unusual decline in sales and a severe cash flow problem." They could also just be wacky, such as, "If Dannon, Yoplait, and Colombo yogurts came to life, what kind of people would they be?"

Change management. Here's a $5 buzzword that sounds like it's making things clear, when really it's just muddying up an already fuzzy concept. Most firms use this term to refer to a specific type of consulting work dedicated to such things as helping a company restructure its organization and cope with the human problems that accompany such an effort.

Convergence. Consulting services in telecommunications (cable, wireless, wireline, and Internet), computers, and media—or "converging" industries. The thinking is that the Internet, the telephone, the TV, the PDA, and the PC will someday all become one.

Core competencies. Things a company does best.

Customer relationship management (CRM). Communication technology that helps companies manage customer information.

Deliverable. The product or solution you give (deliver) to the client. If you promise an analysis of shipping costs, for instance, that's your deliverable. Deliverables typically come with dates (when you will deliver).

Engagement/project/study/case/job. These are all different ways in which the firms refer to a specific project. Interviewers often note which term you use—just to see whether you've read the company literature. Using the wrong word is not an automatic ding, but you'll impress your interviewer if you get it right.

Enterprise resource planning (ERP). An IT solution to streamline operations by connecting all parts of a business electronically—including HR, billing, and inventory. A popular consulting project during the '90s, ERP spurred double-digit annual growth for firms.

Framework. Basically, a framework is any kind of structure you can use to look at a problem. It can be as simple as, "The company's problems stem from both internal and external factors." Or it can be something more MBA-ish, like Porter's Five Forces. Consultants love frameworks, and the more you use them (up to a point), the more analytical you'll sound.

Growth. From 1997–98 to around 2000, most firms shifted their focus from reengineering—which often meant downsizing—to growth. Growth involved taking a small private start-up from, say, 25 or 30 employees to more than 500 and going public.

Implementation. These days, nobody admits to doing just pure strategy work. The reason? Too many consulting firms were criticized for leaving behind a big stack of slides that never resulted in any action by the client. As a result, all of the firms talk about how they work with clients to make sure that their expensive analyses and recommendations are actually implemented.

On the beach. In consulting, this refers to any period of time during which you aren't staffed to a project. Although you won't necessarily see any sunshine here, you also won't have to be any place in particular, so there's a chance you'll be able to leave the office early, do your laundry, pay your bills, and maybe even see your honey.

Operations. Operations refers to all of the day-to-day tasks associated with the running of a company. In a manufacturing company, this includes the buying and processing of raw materials as well as the sale and distribution of the final products. Many consulting firms do a big business providing operations advice. At the simplest level, this just means that they help clients run their businesses better.

Outsourcing. To reduce overhead expenses, lots of companies are turning to outsiders to provide many of the functions and services traditionally done in-house. Popular candidates for outsourcing include accounting services, marketing communications, payroll management, and data processing. Increasingly, public firms are turning to these services because they create stable revenue flows, which their investors like.

Pay-for-performance. Billing based on performance, rather than strictly on hours.

Presentation. In the traditional consulting project, the presentation was the means by which a consulting firm shared all of its insights and recommendations with a client company. The client's top management team would assemble in a boardroom, and a partner or case team manager would spin through dozens of overhead slides displaying all of the analysis his or her firm had completed. Although the standard overhead slideshow is now considered a bit sterile, it's still a popular drill at most firms.

Reengineering. Reengineering lost its cachet in the mid-'90s. In its purest sense, a reengineering project was supposed to involve a complete rethinking of a company's operations from ground zero.

Shareholder value analysis. The goal of many companies is to enhance their value to shareholders, and they engage lots of consulting firms to help them do it. There are all manner of ways, proprietary and not, to analyze shareholder value.

True north. The place you want to get to. If you're heading true north, you're moving in the right direction.

Value chain analysis. An analysis of all of the processes that go into a product, from the gathering of raw materials needed to make the product to the delivery of the final product to the customer. At best, each stage adds value to the product.

Virtual office/hoteling. Sexy terms for an office setup in which nobody has a personal desk or office. Means you could be hanging out with the clerks at Kinko's.

White-space opportunity. A money-making opportunity in an area you aren't set up to make money in. Think of it as an unbridged gap between what you do and what others do, or an untapped source of growth.

Recommended Reading

"The Top 25 Consultants, 2003"

Consulting Magazine ranks the then President and CEO-elect of BCG, Hans-Paul Bürkner number two on its list. Bürkner discusses the value of management consulting and his firm's increasingly collaborative methods. Mr. Bürkner says the trend among some major companies to create management consulting units to evaluate themselves will not lead to the demise of firms such as BCG, which can provide more objective analysis of what their customers need to do to improve. The 20-year BCG veteran says that when he started, consultants were trained to execute many different tasks but that now they operate in small teams of specialists that offer a wide range of expertise.

Source: *Consulting Magazine*, July/August 2003.

"Serving Leadership Sunny-Side Up"

BCG Senior Vice President Jeanie Duck's ideas about the human side of corporate change are explored in this *Consulting Magazine* cover story. As the article points out, Duck and BCG take the impact of change on organizations very seriously. BCG is the only consulting firm with a senior partner—Duck—dedicated to evaluating the human side of corporate change. Duck believes that CEOs (and consultants) often fail to communicate effectively with their workforce about the reasons behind and the scope of changes, which can lead to disastrous consequences for the organization. According to Duck, when employees don't know what's going on, they naturally assume the worst. The best way to combat this is—it's so simple—to let employees know what's going on and why. Of course, doing that effectively is the hard part.

Source: Russ Banham, *Consulting Magazine*, April 2003.

"Finding more than 'Free Love' at Open Source's Core"

Linux, the open source operating system, has been successful thanks to the efforts of the programmers who contribute the fruits of their efforts to the open source community as a whole. Does the open source model have anything to teach business leaders? BCG thinks so, and three BCG consultants have been studying the open source community for more than 2 years. It's a model companies managing large numbers of engineers, chemists, or programmers could employ to boost productivity and foster innovation. According to the article, several BCG clients have found the idea intriguing, and there's a book in the works. Could "community-building" be the next big thing in the world of business?

Source: D. C. Denison, *The Boston Globe*, March 16, 2003.

"Ideas Man at the Leading Edge"

This *Financial Times* interview with BCG's outgoing CEO, Carl Stern, discusses some of the big ideas that have come out of BCG through the years. Asked about the product portfolio matrix, which divides a company's businesses into "dogs," "cash cows," "question marks," and "stars," Stern notes that, thanks to BCG's ideas, companies no longer make the mistake of poring resources into dogs or cash cows at the expense of their stars. According to Stern, ideas are the cornerstone of BCG's success in the past and essential to its future. Of course, things have been tough on the consulting industry, but as business picks up, Stern seems to feel that BCG's people and ideas give it an advantage when it comes to helping customers develop competitive strategies. Sterns is quoted as saying that BCG's people "are perhaps a little edgier, perhaps a little more creative at the margins." Of note to people considering a career at BCG are Stern's comments on the people BCG recruits: "Even though we are drawing from a similar pool [as other consulting firms], we get slightly different people. I think our people are more comfortable operating in unstructured or less structured environments."

Source: Michael Skapinker, *Financial Times*, June 26, 2002.

For Further Study

Read *Perspectives on Strategy: From the Boston Consulting Group* to learn more about the influential ideas that have come out of BCG. Edited by Carl Stern and George Stalk (see "Key People"), this book was published in February 1998 and collects the writing of various thought leaders at BCG over the years.

To learn more about how some BCG vice presidents are "applying the concepts of deconstruction to the Internet space," see *Blown to Bits* by Philip Evans and Thomas Wurster at www.blowntobits.com or through www.bcg.com.

Get a feel for the thinking coming from BCG's Strategy Institute as it adapts the wisdom of a 19th century Prussian general to today's business world in *Clausewitz on Strategy*, edited by Christopher Bassford, Tiha von Ghyczy, and Bolko von Oetinger.

In *The Change Monster: The Human Forces that Fuel or Foil Corporate Transformation and Change*, BCG Senior Vice President and sculptor Jeanie Daniel Duck draws on 20 years of experience to look beyond the numbers and discuss the human factors which must be considered when trying to bring about change.

You'll also find plenty of recent publications written by a variety of BCG consultants by exploring the publications listed at www.bcg.com/new_ideas/new_ideas_splash.jsp.

A general resource for information about the consulting industry is *Consultants News*, published by Kennedy Information: www.kennedyinfo.com/mc/mcindex.html.

Read WetFeet's *Ace Your Case!* series for expert help in mastering the case interview, and *Killer Consulting Resumes* for resume advice tailored to those seeking work in consulting. Both books are available online at www.WetFeet.com and www.Amazon.com.

Key People and Places

Key People

John Clarkeson, co-chairman
Carl Stern, co-chairman
Hans-Paul Bürkner, president and CEO
Hugh Simons, CFO
Philip Catchings, CAO
George Stalk, SVP, director of BCG's innovation, marketing, and communications group
Bolko von Oetinger, SVP, director of the BCG Strategy Institute

Recruiting Contacts

If BCG recruits at your school, submit your resume through your campus career center. Otherwise (regardless of your first-choice office assignment), apply online on the Careers at BCG pages of the website: www.bcg.com/careers/careers_splash.jsp.

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Who We Are

WetFeet is the trusted destination for job seekers to research companies and industries, and manage their careers. WetFeet Insider Guides provide you with inside information for a successful job search. At WetFeet, we do the work for you and present our results in an informative, credible, and entertaining way. Think of us as your own private research company whose primary mission is to assist you in making more informed career decisions.

WetFeet was founded in 1994 by Stanford MBAs Gary Alpert and Steve Pollock. While exploring our next career moves, we needed products like the WetFeet Insider Guides to help us through the research and interviewing game. But they didn't exist. So we started writing. Today, WetFeet serves more than a million job candidates each month by helping them nail their interviews, avoid ill-fated career decisions, and add thousands of dollars to their compensation packages. The quality of our work and knowledge of the job-seeking world have also allowed us to develop an extensive corporate and university membership.

In addition, WetFeet's services include two award-winning websites (WetFeet.com and InternshipPrograms.com), Web-based recruiting technologies, consulting services, and our exclusive research studies, such as the annual WetFeet Student Recruitment Survey. Our team members, who come from diverse backgrounds, share a passion about the job-search process and a commitment to delivering the highest quality products and customer service.

About Our Name

One of the most frequent questions we receive is, "So, what's the story behind your name?" The short story is that the inspiration for our name comes from a popular business school case study about L.L. Bean, the successful mail-order company. Leon Leonwood Bean got his start because he quite simply, and very literally, had a case of wet feet. Every time he went hunting in the Maine woods, his shoes leaked, and he returned with soaked feet. So, one day, he decided to make a better hunting shoe. And he did. And he told his friends, and they lined up to buy their own pairs of Bean boots. And L.L. Bean, the company, was born . . . all because a man who had wet feet decided to make boots.

The lesson we took from the Bean case? Lots of people get wet feet, but entrepreneurs make boots. And that's exactly what we're doing at WetFeet.

Careers/Job Search

With a reputation for generating innovative ideas, The Boston Consulting Group manages to stand out despite its relatively small size. The firm is comfortably settled within the top tier of management consulting firms, and its widely recognized strategy work and international status make it competitive with the likes of McKinsey, Booz Allen, and Bain. BCG differentiates itself from the competition with its autonomous but supportive atmosphere, its creative approach to problem solving, and a heavy focus on strategy and operations work. Interested in learning more?

Turn to this WetFeet Insider Guide to learn about

- What differentiates BCG from its high-brow competitors.
- The frameworks developed by BCG and used by companies and MBA students the world over.
- Key responsibilities for MBAs and undergrads at BCG.
- A day in the life of a BCG associate or consultant.
- The lifestyle, hours, and compensation you can expect if you land a job there.
- What BCG employees love and hate about working for the firm.
- What the recruiting process entails, what recruiters are looking for, and tips from BCG insiders for acing the interview.